

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 22, 2022

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Chairwoman
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee

Dear Chairwoman Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce,

We write to urge you to provide a substantial increase in the fiscal year (FY) 2023 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for the Bureau of Indian Education's (BIE) budget for deferred maintenance and construction of K-12 schools and for Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). This increase is critical to addressing the dire need of improving BIE school facilities across Tribal and Pueblo communities and ensuring that the BIE can increase capacity and personnel to continue dispersing funds and administering programs. Increasing funding for tribal schools and colleges is vital to ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of tribal students, ensuring they have access to high quality educational opportunities, and to upholding the federal government's moral, trust, and treaty obligations to our Tribal nations.

As you know, BIE's K-12 schools currently serve more than 48,000 Native students across the country. Of the 183 K-12 schools BIE operates or supports, 86 are reported to be in poor condition and 73 of these schools lack funding for repairs, including schools that teach students across 15 states. In addition, the BIE acknowledges that there are another 41 schools, spanning an additional four states, that are only in fair condition. This includes dozens of schools in disconcerting and unacceptable levels of disrepair, that threaten the health, safety, and educational opportunities of students. Current BIE funding levels are insufficient to address staffing, repair, and replacement needs across all of these schools, creating a situation that becomes increasingly dire every year. Additionally, 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities also serve more than 160,000 Native and rural students each year through academic and community-based programs at more than 75 sites in 16 states. TCUs are in critical need of significantly increased funding for operations, physical repairs, and broadband access, which are vital to educational opportunities.

The BIE has a unique and vital role in providing educational opportunities that are fundamental to student success and thriving communities. However, students cannot thrive in schools that are in disrepair, and in some cases unsafe. Every day, students and educators across these schools have to worry about crumbling facilities, leaking roofs, flooding, and other hazards that can often force institutions to send students home without adequate access to remote instruction. Current levels of funding for BIE schools are insufficient to address these needs. It is estimated that \$4.5 billion is needed to fully address BIE's K-12 construction needs and an additional \$3.27 billion is needed for TCU construction, deferred maintenance, rehabilitation, and construction completion.^{1, 2}

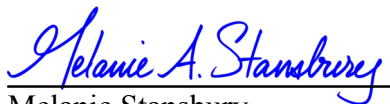
1 Senate Committee on Indian Affairs: Examining the COVID-19 Response in Native Communities: Native Education Systems One Year Later, 117 (April 28, 2021) (Tony L. Dearman, Director of Bureau of Indian Affairs).

2 AIHEC, TCUs: Survey of TCU Deferred Maintenance, Construction, and Master Plan Needs and Costs; July 2021.

While we understand that funding tribal schools is a priority for the Administration, the President's FY 2023 Budget requests \$891.5 million for K-12 schools and \$185.2 million for TCU's due to constraints on the executive budget. We urge you to dramatically increase funding for construction line items in the BIE budget in Committee to more closely align with needs on the ground. We applaud the year-to-year increase in funding that the Committee has provided for BIE programs in the past and urge you to consider a substantial increase this year to align with these needs and to uphold our obligations to our Tribal nations and students.

We thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

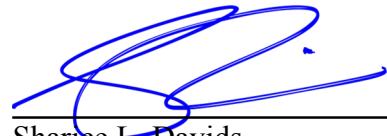
Sincerely,



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Markwayne Mullin
Member of Congress



Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
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Ro Khanna
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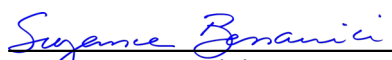
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



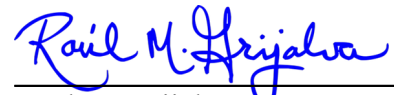
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